

Task Force A Meeting Summary

Thursday, March 23, 2006

Task Force Participants: Jim Byrum – Michigan Agri-Business Association, Keith Creagh – MI Department of Agriculture (chair), Mike Hamm – Michigan State University, Bill Knudson – MSU Product Center, JoAnn Merrick – MI Department of Environmental Quality, Dan Reeves – Associated Food Dealers of Michigan, Todd Regis – United Food and Commercial Workers 951, Irma Zuckerberg – MI Department of Labor and Economic Growth.

Additional Participants: Marcia Black-Watson – MI Department of Labor and Economic Growth, Susan Cocciarelli – Michigan State University, Kathy Fedder – MI Department of Agriculture, Marty Gibbs – MI Department of Labor and Economic Growth, Alisande Henry – MI Department of Labor and Economic Growth.

The fifth Task Force A: Expanding Food-Related Businesses and Jobs meeting convened Thursday, March 23, 2006 from 10:00am – 12:00pm at Constitution Hall in Lansing. MDA Deputy Director Keith Creagh chaired the meeting and began the meeting with a welcome and a round of introductions.

The Task Force reviewed Recommendation A3 (Supermarkets in Underserved Locations), which was not passed at the full Council meeting in February. The Council sent the recommendation back to the task force for further discussion and consideration of MI Department of Human Services' (DHS) concerns on the subject of food stamp issuance. The recommendation includes a suggestion that DHS stagger food stamp issuance over the course of a month to increase grocery store viability in low-income areas. DHS is concerned that the administrative burden would be too large, and that the transition phase would be extremely difficult to manage. The Task Force decided that this is a critical component for grocery viability and food access in underserved areas and should remain in the recommendation.

The task force reviewed the Implementation Strategies section of Recommendation A3, and made some minor changes. MFPC staff will incorporate these changes and send the revised recommendation out to Task Force participants for further input or approval. Recommendation A3 is:

Recommendation A3: Improve access to fresh and healthy foods by Increasing the number of supermarkets and fresh food retail outlets that serve urban low-income populations.

- a) MI Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) should identify five communities in which to initiate pilot feasibility studies for urban grocery store development in

underserved communities and supply matching funds given availability and/or work with private foundations to fund the studies.

- b) MI Department of Human Services should distribute food stamp dollars once per month per client but issue benefits throughout the month so they are not concentrated at the beginning of the month in any given locale.

The Task Force moved on to the next topic for recommendation development: entrepreneurship in the food and agriculture industries. The discussion began with a review of the background document prepared by MFPC staff for the meeting. Participants decided that Recommendation A4 (Entrepreneurship) should read as follows:

Recommendation A4: Encourage entrepreneurs in agri-food businesses and support the networks that help them to be successful.

Task Force members ultimately decided that a smaller workgroup should meet to identify approximately three major implementation strategies to include in the recommendation. MFPC staff will convene a meeting of this workgroup in the next few weeks. MFPC staff will send out a more fully developed recommendation, based on the outcome of this workgroup meeting, to Task Force participants for review and feedback.

The next Task Force A meeting is Monday, April 17th from 2:00pm – 3:30pm, Constitution Hall, Brake Room (lower level).